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A Walker Trial Ended in a Conviction Last Week A Cluster of Cases Makes Espionage Hard to Ignore

By PHILIP SHENON

SAN FRANCISCO — Senator Patrick J. Leahy of Vermont is perhaps best known in Washington as senior Democrat on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. But until recently, he said, most of his constituents were clearly more concerned about his efforts on behalf of Vermont's farmers, not on the intricacies of intelligence policies that seemed to involve seamy doings in faraway places.

That began to change in a dramatic way, the Senator said, with the arrest in May of John A. Walker Jr., a retired Navy warrant officer accused of masterminding a ring of spies that stole secrets for the Soviet Union. "When they hear about Walker, people understand why the intelligence work I do is so important," he said. "People are worried. They are paying attention now to the problems of spying."

Some specialists in the vagaries of public opinion would disagree that much of America has become captivated by the Walker case and a number of other espionage investigations that have come to light in recent months. But last week there appeared to have been so many developments involving accused spies — who all denied their guilt — that most people had to have taken some notice, however briefly.

In Norfolk, Va., after four days of testimony without a jury, a Federal judge found Arthur J. Walker, John's older brother, guilty of stealing classified documents from a defense contractor and delivering them to his brother, who allegedly smuggled them to Soviet agents. Judge J. Calvitt Clarke Jr. set sentencing for Arthur Walker, a retired Navy lieutenant commander, for Oct. 15.

Here in San Francisco, a man described as John Walker's best friend,

Jerry A. Whitworth, was arraigned on a 12-count indictment that charged him with providing the Soviet Union with details of a computerized Navy communications system. John Walker's son, Michael, a Navy yeoman, has also been arrested.

The investigation of the Navy spy ring, which Pentagon officials say may have compromised some of the military's most precious secrets, is only the best-known of the several espionage inquiries under way. Richard W. Miller, a former agent of the Federal Bureau of Investi-

gation, was on trial in Los Angeles last week, charged with arranging to pass Government secrets to the Soviet Union through a Russian émigré. No F.B.I. agent had ever been charged with espionage before.

In Alexandria, Va., last week, a former clerk for the Central Intelligence Agency, Sharon Scranage, was indicted by a Federal grand jury. She was accused of providing a Ghanaian friend, who was also named in the indictment, with details about American intelligence operations in Africa, including the names of agents working covertly in Ghana.

Congress's reaction to the rash of spying allegations was immediate — and vocal. As a result of the Walker case specifically, a House-Senate conference committee last month approved proposals that would allow execution of spies under military law and would permit the Pentagon to make wider use of lie-detector tests to ferret out spies. The proposals have been approved by the Senate; final action in the House won't come until next month.

With the barrage of news accounts about suspected spies, an unprecedented number of Americans — or so members of Congress report — have written their elected representatives in Washington, urging, among other things, a beefing up of counterintelligence programs. "Until these cases, I don't believe the public thought very much about this problem," said Representative Bill McCollum Jr., Republican of Florida and author of the death-penalty measure. "The Walkers made the difference."

Some authorities say that accurate parallels cannot be drawn between the recent arrests and the espionage cases of the 1940's and 1950's. In the most celebrated spy case of the 1950's, Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted of providing atomic secrets to the Soviet Union for ideological reasons. The motive of the Walker ring, officials say, was simple greed.

"In the 40's and 50's, we were talking about people who were Communist loyalists, and it was easy to create a red scare among the public," said Michael P. Rogin, a professor of political science at the University of California at Berkeley. "It was simple to get people worked up and anxious. Now the motive is money, and that's not such a threat to the public. In fact, to some people, the Walkers may just seem like the apotheosis of the American way of life."

Still others believe there is intense interest in the Walker case because of its mixture of high drama and banal soap opera. John Walker was turned in to the authorities by his ex-wife and their daughter, a Christian evangelist involved in a bitter dispute over custody of her five-year-old son. After Mr. Walker's arrest, the plot twists kept coming: the arrest of Mr. Walker's son, then his brother, then his friend, Mr. Whitworth.

"People have been attracted by this wonderful family drama, a real-life 'Dynasty,'" said Harlan K. Ullman, a senior fellow at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies.

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